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ITALIAN

RENAISSANCE

MAIOLICA

ELLING EXHIBITION MOUNTED BY
CIRCULATION DEPARTMENT OF THE
VICTORIA & ALBERT MUSEUM

MAIOLICA is the name given to the tin-glazed, painted earthenware pottery of Italy. It reached a summit of artistic quality in the late 15th and early 16th centuries, and was part of the flowering of the visual arts known as the Renaissance. It came from the grafting of the Islamic tin-glaze tradition on to the ancient traditions of native Italian pottery. This occurred early in the 15th century, when the more developed and sophisticated Hispano-Moresque wares of Valencia were being imported and imitated by the Italian potters. It was to this flow of imports that we owe the name 'maiolica', which derives from the name of Majorca, the headquarters of the trading vessels sailing between the Spanish and the Italian ports and not, as was mistakenly supposed, the place of origin of these wares.

The essential processes of maiolica pottery are as follows: the thrown or moulded wares are first fired to a 'biscuit' condition. The porous biscuit-ware is then dipped into, or coated with, the liquid tin-oxide glaze. The glaze is then allowed to dry. At this point, the decoration is applied and, because of the velvety absorbent nature of the white unfired glaze, the painter has to be skilful and work with confidence, since retouching is impossible. A second firing fuses together the glaze and the decoration to an even, glossy surface. This spontaneous and direct painting technique led to a vigour of design which, combined with a wealth of imagery from both art and literature, produced one of the most fascinating and delightful interludes in the history of ceramics.

The Victoria and Albert Museum is fortunate in possessing the finest collection of Renaissance maiolica in the world, largely acquired in the '50s and '60s of the last century. At the same time, complementing the collection, the Museum acquired the manuscript, *Li tre libri dell'Arte del Vasaio*, by Cipriano Piccolpasso of Castel Durante. This is a contemporary (about 1558) illustrated treatise of unique importance on the art and craft of maiolica. Photographic reproductions of many of the drawings, and of parts of the text, have been included in this exhibition. Also shown is an enlarged map of Italy marked with the sites of the maiolica potteries active during the period covered by this exhibition. The map is from *Delle Citta d'Italia* by Cesare Orlandi, Perugia, 1770.

…ed ornament and a broad band …ppearing formalefoliage, buds, and …ments, symmetrically disposed. …e back, five concentric circles …ured in yellow lustre. Deruta; …-1520. Bernal Collection. …n. (33.6cm) …-1855. Photo: 46195

…VASE with two handles (lid …ing), painted in blue, and yellow …re. At the top, a band of bud …ves, next, a panel of scale pattern …ded on either side by narrow …h of dots and scales. At the …per part, a band of scale pattern …below, gadroons. On the foot, a …of tongue and dart ornament. …ar to cat. nos.472, 473, 474 …ca. about 1520. Soulages …ection. H.9¼ in (24 cm) …-1865

…small BOWL with relief decora… …painted in blue, and yellow… …ve lustre. Inside, in relief, St. …me kneels with a crucifix in his …hand and a stone in his right …d. Beside him is a lion and, at his …a cardinal's hat and a book. …ther right, a stylised landscape …a hill and buildings. The outside …the bowl has three concentric …in lustre. Similar to cat. no. 774 …ca. about 1530–1535. Bernal …llection. D.6in (15.9cm) …-1855

…DISH moulded in relief, and …ured in blue, and ruby and gold …re. In the centre, a pair of …ined hands with a heart pierced by …arrow above, and a fire below. …round the rim, a band of radial oak …ves with berries between. …Related to cat. nos.703, 705, etc. …Deruta; about 1530–1535. Soulages …Collection. D.8¼in. (21.8cm) …-1863

…DISH (*bacile*), painted in blue, …range, yellow, and green. In the …centre, a half-figure of a lady in a …low-necked dress with one breast …exposed. She wears a turban and …holds a carnation with a curving …stem. To the left is a distant landscape …with hills and buildings. The rim is …divided into eight panels alternately …containing scale pattern and a …stylised scroll terminating in a flower. …The whole is covered with a yellow …tin-coloured glaze. Related to …cat. nos.745, 749, 757, 782. Deruta; …c.1540. Castellani Collection. …D. 15½in. (39.7cm) …-1874

…II.

…'storiato' style; …16th century

…the 15th century, maiolica styles …began to ignore the functional …forms of pottery. Dishes and vases began …to be painted primarily as decorative …pieces (pitture di pompa) for display on …the walls. This applied especially to …the storiato (narrative) style, mainly …associated with Urbino, where it was …developed by the 1530s. Earlier …pieces illustrated in this style, however, …have been made at Faenza, …Deruta, and Castel Durante. …In most studies, the invention of printing and engraving, as well as the widespread admiration and respect for the art of painting, combined to create this style and to provide its sources of inspiration. Subjects for illustration were taken from Roman history (8), Greek and Roman mythology (3, 4, 10), the Bible (2, 5, 7) and, occasionally, contemporary literature. The imagery was often derived from engravings or from contemporary woodcut illustrations in books, which were now for the first time being printed. The popular decorative style in which the idealised heads of beautiful women form the subject (already seen in Case II in examples from Deruta), was treated in more realistic style by the istoriato painters from Castel Duranti and Urbino (1). These dishes were probably intended as love tokens (coppe d'amatorie).

[1] DISH on a low foot, painted in blue, yellow, orange, manganese purple, green and white. A lady, full-face, wearing a turban embroidered with an arabesque design; behind her shoulders is a scroll inscribed '*Margarita*'. Similar to cat. no. 543, attributed by Rackham to Nicola Pellipario. Castel Durante; about 1525. Bernal Collection. D.8in (20.7cm) 1698–1855. Photo: 54698

[2] DISH on a low foot, painted in blue, yellow, orange, green, greenish brown, black, and white. In the foreground, Cain is killing Abel with a club. In the background, a figure holding a knife flees; the Almighty appears above the scene amongst clouds. There are two flaming altars on the right, each with a deep cleft in its side. On the back, yellow concentric bands and the inscription, '*Cain gando ucise abello suo fratello*'. Similar to cat. no. 925, and probably derived from the same source engraving. Rimini; about 1540–1545. Bernal Collection. D.10¼in. (27.5cm) 1703–1855. Photo: 46208

[3] DISH, painted in blue, yellow, orange, green, manganese purple, white, and blue-black. Seated figures in a landscape with ruins. In the centre, Apollo crowned with laurel plays a stringed instrument. Pan, seated with another figure on the right, is holding a syrinx. On the left is a group of three figures. On the back, yellow concentric bands and the inscription, '*Apollo e pan*'. The subject, the Contest of Apollo and Pan, is taken from Ovid's Metamorphoses (Book XI). Painted in the style attributed by Rackham to Francesco Durantino. Urbino; about 1545. Bernal Collection. D.10¼in. (27cm) 1692–1855. Photo: 48201

[4] PLATE (*tondino*), painted in blue, yellow, orange, green, brown, black, and white. In the centre, a rocky crag with the sea and mountains beyond. To the left, Vulcan forges an arrowhead. To the right, Cupid embraces Venus. In the sky above, he flies with bow and arrow. In front of the rock, a putto tends a fire. On the back, yellow concentric bands and the inscription, '*Vlcano e Venere*'. Painted in the style attributed by Rackham to Francesco Durantino. Urbino; about 1545. Bernal Collection. D.7¾in. (19.9cm) 1787–1855. Photo: 5776

[5] DISH, painted in blue, yellow, orange, green, manganese purple, blue-black, buff, black, and white. A crowded scene at the edge of a town including soldiers, citizens, two horsemen, and one woman. In the centre, a soldier holds a human head over a sack held by a kneeling man, the woman points to it. On the back, the inscription, '*Sagine rist/ Sagine bibe*'. Perhaps painted by Guido Durantino. Urbino; about 1540–1550. Bernard Webb Bequest. D.10¼in (27.2cm) Circ. 339–1919

[6] DISH, painted in blue, yellow, orange, manganese purple, greeny-grey, and white. A maiden (Fortune ?) rides on the back of a swan, swimming in a lake set in a mountainous landscape. Painted in the style attributed by Rackham to the workshop of Domenigo da Venezia (see cat. no. 974). Venice; about 1550–1560. R. Clarke Edwards Gift. D.8¼in. (20.8cm) Circ. 83–1918

[7] DISH, painted in blue, yellow, orange, green, manganese purple, greeny-grey, blue-black, and white. A scene on the terraced courtyard of a palace with a distant lake and mountains. A group of figures gesture towards a bearded old man who sits up in bed and leans down to a boy kneeling at the bedside. A woman leans forward also. On the back, yellow concentric bands and the inscription, '*Jacobbe*'. The subject, Jacob being blessed by his blind father Isaac (Gen. 27.27). Similar to cat. no. 818, and probably derived from the same source. Urbino; about 1560. Soulages Collection. D.10¼ins. (27.6cm) 8912–1863. Photo: 5961

[8] LARGE DISH, painted in blue, yellow, orange, manganese purple, green, greeny-grey, blue-black, and white. In the foreground, three groups of Roman soldiers; the central group stand, gesturing, around a flaming vase. Behind them are tents, and in the distance, a mountainous landscape and water. On the back, concentric yellow bands and the inscription, '*Mutio che la sua destra eramte cocie*'. The subject, Mucius Scaevola in the camp of King Porsena (Livy II). Related in both style and subject to cat. no. 832, attributed to the Fontana workshop. Urbino; about 1560–1570. Soulages Collection. D.15¼in. (39.2cm) 7167–1860. Photo: 3887

[9] DISH, painted in blue, yellow, orange, green, manganese purple, greeny-grey, black, and white. The sacrifice of a sheep in front of an altar, a group of ten figures with four sheep, a bull, and two giraffes in the background. Behind is the sea, and beyond, a town and a mountain. On the back, yellow concentric bands and the inscription, '*Il Sagrefitio*'. Probably from the Fontana workshop. Urbino; 1560–1570. Soulages Collection. D.10¼in. (26.6cm) 8913–1863. Photo: 4579

[10] DISH (foot missing), painted in blue, yellow, orange, green, greenish grey, and white. Neptune walking on the sea with two sea-horses beside him. Probably Urbino; 1570–1580. Soulages Collection. D.8¼in. (21.6cm) 8954–1863. Photo: 46200

IV

Ornamental designs; 16th century

The decorative repertory of the maiolica painter was considerably increased in the 16th century by the currency of printed material. Illustrated books and engravings of ornamental motives, published specifically as sources for decorative designers, were available for the first time. The main source of inspiration for decoration was, in common with all the arts of the Renaissance, the world of Greek and Roman antiquity, for which tangible evidence lay about Italy in the ruined tombs, villas, and palaces of Imperial Rome. The fertile imagination of the Renaissance designer, and consequently that of the maiolica painter, conjured up a pagan world peopled with cupids, satyrs, sphinxes, and other such mythical beings (7). Acanthus foliage and the palmette ornament were used in varying forms, and a favourite motive was the Roman device of the trophy of arms (2, 4, 8), often incongruously combined with Christian imagery or verbal sentiment (1). From the East, by way of Venice and her Islamic metalworkers, came the arabesque style, characterised by a continuous interlacing of formalised leaves and branches (2, 5). Maiolica painters often combined several of these elements to form a number of new decorative modes, prevalent towards the middle of the century. Most of the maiolica styles were categorised in the manuscript Li tre libri dell'Arte del Vasaio (c. 1558) by Cipriano Piccolpasso, illustrations from which are shown elsewhere in the exhibition.

[1] PLATE (*tondino*), painted in blue, shades of grey, and white. In the centre, a tablet inscribed '*In nomine dom*', above, a circle supported by scrollwork; below, the head and wings of a putto. Surrounding this, a band of foliated scrollwork in *bianco sopra bianco*. On the rim, four trophies of arms connected by foliage and ribbons. Two of the trophies have superimposed scrolls, each inscribed '*Ama dio*', all *en grisaille* in reserve on a blue ground. Related to cat. nos. 568, 569, attributed by Rackham to Nicola Pellipario. Castel Durante; about 1525. Soulages Collection. D.9¼in. (24.7cm) 8957–1863. Photo: 7700

[2] PLATE (*tondino*), painted in dark blue, white, green, and orange, on a light blue ground (*berettino*). In the centre, a trophy of arms. The border consists of arabesque-influenced scrollwork and strapwork knots, enclosed by a formal wreath. On the back, four sketchy spiral motives separated by four zigzag rays. Related to cat. nos. 287, 288. Faenza; about 1530. Bernal Collection. D.9¼in. (24.7cm) 1729–1855. Photo: 46211

[3] PLATE, painted in blue, yellow, green, and blue-black. In the centre, a profile bust of a man painted *en camaieu*, enclosed by a laurel wreath. Surrounding this, interlacing oak branches (*arcpiate*) in yellow on a deep blue ground. On the back, around the rim, two yellow concentric bands. Cat.no.598. Castel Durante or Urbino; about 1530–1535. Soulages Collection. D.9¼in. (24.2cm)
8960–1863. Photo: 68524

[4] DISH with a low foot, painted in blue, orange, green, sepia, and white. Ruby lustre added later. In the centre, a roundel with a cupid walking in a landscape. Surrounding this, a plain band of lustre. The border consists of alternate trophies of shields and drums with scrolling ribbons between. On the back, six spiral motives in ruby lustre. The quality of the figure painting suggests an attribution to Francesco Xanto. Related to cat.no.717. Urbino or Castel Durante, lustred at Gubbio; about 1535–1540. Soulages Collection. D.9¼in. (24.6cm)
7687–1861

[5] PLATE, painted in dark blue, white, yellow, and orange, on a light blue ground (*berettino*). In the centre, a roundel with a bearded man holding a book upright (Moses?). On the rim, a repeating symmetrical design of scrollwork, wings and open books. On the back, four floral motives separated by four zigzag rays. Similar to cat.no.299, attributed by Rackham to the painter known as 'The Green Man'. Faenza; 1530–1540. Bernal Collection. D.9¼in. (24.1cm)
1677–1855. Photo: 46188

[6] DRUG-POT (*albarello*), painted in blue, greeny-grey, and white. On the front is a large scrolled label inscribed in Gothic letters '*Mostarda f.*' (fine mustard). The scroll is surrounded by a medley of tools, instruments, and utensils, and includes a wooden tub containing a child and two rabbits. Above and below this, a band of wreath ornament. At the rim, bead ornament and, at the base, a narrow band of diagonal hatching. From the same set as cat.no.613. Castel Durante, about 1556. H.15¼in. (38.8cm)
2856–1856

[7] DRUG-POT (*albarello*), painted in blue, yellow, reddish-orange, green, and light brown. Around the middle, a label with scrolling ends, inscribed 'DIA. CATHOLICN. M' (electuary of catholicon or panacea). Above this, a bust of a man within a wreath supported by grotesque human figures. Below the label, a smaller bust of a man on a wreathed cartouche supported by long-necked semi-human monsters. On the opposite side, a tablet dated 1562. Above the tablet, a lion's mask and two human masks in profile on either side, conjoined. Below, two dolphins. Around both rim and base are a band of trophies and a band of wreath ornament. Related to cat.no. 614, but painting of finer quality. Castel Durante; 1562. H.8¼in. (22.5cm)
1570–1855. Photo: 46198

[8] DRUG-JAR (*albarello*), painted in blue, yellow, reddish-brown, green, manganese brown, blue-black and opaque white. On one side is a figure of a queen with crown and sceptre and a canopy above. She is seated on a throne carved with a monster on either side. The remainder of the jar is covered with trophies of shields and helmets, one bearing a monastic pharmacy mark, and a tablet with the date 1574. Around the lower part is a label inscribed 'DIA CALAMENTO' (electuary of calamint). From the same set as cat. no.1010. Perhaps Castel Durante; 1574. H.8in (20cm)
4389–1857. Photo: 20004

[9] DRUG-JAR (*albarello*), painted in blue, brown, and white on a light blue (*berettino*) ground. Around the middle is a blank label with folded and scrolling ends. Around the neck and foot, borders of arabesque-influenced scrollwork. The remaining surface is closely covered with semi-naturalistic foliage and nuts or berries. Similar to cat.no.982. Venice; about 1580–1600. H.8¼in. (22cm)
713–1894

V

Late Renaissance designs; second half of the 16th century

Signs of a reaction against pictorial expression in maiolica decoration can be seen in the mid-century Faenza dish with the arabesque-influenced pattern of scrolling foliage (1). Both the flamboyant decoration and the undulating form of the dish (crespina)*, which imitates* repoussé *metalwork, illustrate the onset of the Baroque style. At Urbino, the main centre of the pictorial style, the reaction led to the use of a sophisticated bizarre style of decoration consisting of a flimsy structure of a medley of elements, such as winged monsters, griffins, grotesque semi-human creatures, urns and masks, linked by swags and garlands (2, 3, 4). These delicately painted, often whimsical, grotesche were set off by a technically perfect white glaze. Their source of inspiration was the interior decorations recently carried out at the Vatican by Raphael and his assistants, which were in turn inspired by ancient Roman fresco decorations. The Urbino factories also produced a variety of three-dimensional pieces, such as salt cellars (5), inkstands, and small statuary, whose forms were evidently inspired by contemporary work in bronze. The ultimate reaction against the overworked polychrome* istoriato *style was embodied in the white ware of Faenza* (bianchi di Faenza)*, whose thick white glaze was delighted in for its own sake (6). The dispersal of craftsmen, particularly from Faenza, exerted a profound influence on the pottery styles of France, Central Europe and, in particular, of the Low Countries; it led also to the general use of the term* faience.

[1] DISH on a low foot with scalloped edge (*crespina*), moulded with shell shapes and masks on the under side; painted in blue, golden yellow, orange, and green. On a central boss, the head and shoulders of a turbanned man facing a vertical panel with a quasi-oriental inscription. The remaining surface divided into panels of varying shape containing foliage, and foliated scrollwork with dolphin head terminals. The back is roughly painted in blue and yellow. Related to cat.nos.934 to 936, and also 264 and 265. Faenza; about 1550. Soulages Collection. D.11in (27.8cm)
8938–1863

[2] DISH for an ewer, painted in blue, blue-black, green, yellow, orange, manganese purple, and white on a white ground which predominates. On the central boss, a monochrome scene with Diana and Cupid. The rest of the dish is divided into three main zones of grotesques, including sphinxes, satyrs, various birds, medallions, and female masks. On the back, in the centre, a figure with a horse, painted in blue, surrounded by bands of beads, rope, and rays, the bands alternately blue and yellow. By the same painter's hand as the grotesque decoration on cat.nos.843 and 844, attributed to the Fontana workshop, Urbino; about 1560. Bernal Collection. D.16¼in. (41.7cm)
1793–1855

[3] CRUET, painted in greyish blue, yellow, browny-orange, manganese brown, and green, on a white ground which predominates. Vase-shaped with handle in the form of two snakes tied together. Below the spout, the device of a flaming pyre with a scroll inscribed 'ARDET AETURNUM'. Below the handle, a tablet inscribed 'OLIO'. The grotesque decoration is symmetrically disposed about the spout, and includes winged semi-human monsters, dolphins, butterflies, snails, etc. Part of the same service as cat.no.882, made for Alfonzo II d'Este, duke of Ferrara, and his wife, Margarita Gonzaga, which is attributed to the Patanazzi workshop, Urbino; about 1579. Soulages Collection. H.6¼in. (16.3cm)
504–1865

[4] PLATE, painted in greyish blue, yellow, orange, manganese brown, greyish-green, blue-black, and white, on a white ground which predominates. In the centre, a winged boy riding a dolphin and holding a trident. Surrounding this, two separate zones of grotesques, including winged terminal figures and other semi-human monsters, dolphins, medallions, flaming torches, coronets, pendant 'jewels', and veiled heads. On the back, yellow concentric bands. By the same painter's hand as cat.no.839, attributed by Rackham to the Fontana workshop, Urbino; about 1580. Soulages Collection. D.10¼in. (26 cm)
8956–1863. Photo: 5976

[5] SALT-CELLAR, painted in blue, yellow, orange, green, purplish-brown, and white. Constructed in the shape of an oval vase with a shallow well at the top edged with beads, and a border of gadrooning below. At each opposite end of the vase is a seated boy holding a shell, and a lion's mask below. On either side is an escutcheon inscribed 'EXCBIAS/AGIMUS/STREN[illegible] QRRELIMUS/HOSTEM'. Both sides of the vase are divided into four panels by scrolls in relief, the ones filled with arabesque scroll work, the lower ones with a fish swimming amongst reeds and a comet in the sky above. The vase is supported by four scroll feet and paw feet and stands on a circular pedestal, which is painted in imitate marble. In the well top is painted the bust of a man green ground. Similar to cat. attributed by Rackham to the painter signing F.G.C., work the Patanazzi workshop. Urbino about 1580. Soulages Collec H.9in. (23.4cm) L.8in. (22 510–1865

[6] DISH on a low foot and scalloped edge (*crespina*). Pain blue, yellow, and orange, on a ground which predomina (*di Faenza*). In the centre a m painted winged boy holding Around the rim is a slight bea beads and scrolls. The decora similar to cat.nos.1057and 10 Faenza; about 1600–1620. Be H. Webb gift. D.9in. (22.8cm) Circ. 661–1913

[7] DISH, flat, on a high foot. Painted in manganese purple, green, yellow, and orange, on a white ground which predomi In the centre, a roundel with a boy holding a shield and staff; remainder of the dish painted summary design of grotesques consisting of winged chimæ winged terminal figures and headed griffins, amongst which 'jewels'. Related to cat.nos.10 1055, and 1057. Deruta, about 1620–1630. L. J. E. Hoope gift. D.9¼in. (24.5cm) H.2¼in. Circ. 724–1931

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